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ABSTRACT

Content trends were analyzed in more than 3,000 articles in two selected special interest magazines ("Audubon" and "Environment") and two general audience magazines ("Time" and "Saturday Review") for the period 1959-1979. Through this analysis, the study examined the role of the two media types as well as the communication process involved in the crystallization and diffusion of the environmentalist movement and the unification of its substantive concerns. For the special interest magazines, a single issue was randomly sampled for each of the years of the study period. For the general audience magazines, one weekly issue was then randomly sampled from the 8-week period corresponding to the already sampled issue of the special interest magazines. Each article was coded, and individual articles served as the unit of analysis. A total of 1,182 articles from special interest and 1,802 articles from general audience magazines were coded. Content variables were defined at three levels of abstraction: general, relevant, yet essentially unfocused environmental content; doctrinal ideology marked by the themes of fragility, diversity, quality, and policy; and comprehensiveness. Data revealed that early sustained attention by special interest magazines preceded attention in general magazines. It was determined that interest in environmental concerns followed a cyclical pattern that had little relation to real events in history, and that the movement went from crusade to popular movement to its current managerial/bureaucratic status. (CRH)

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Magazines and the Environmental Movement: An Ideology Diffusion Model

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Sociologists are increasingly in agreement that "environmental pollution" in all its manifestations is a clearly recognized "social problem" (20), and that "environmentalism" is a bona fide "social movement" (4, 14) with an "ideology" focused on social change. As such, environmentalism has been the subject of a wide variety of mass media coverage, and numerous studies have examined various aspects of relationships among the environmental movement and communication media (12, 31).

By analyzing content trends in 3,056 articles in two selected special-interest (Audubon, Environment) and two general-audience magazines (Time, Saturday Review) over a 20-year period, 1959-1979, this study examined the roles of these two media types as well as the communication processes involved in the crystallization and diffusion of an innovative social change ideology (environmentalism), and the translation over time of this doctrine into a unified realm of substantive concerns.

A guiding framework for this study posited that mass media organizations evolve through three basic adaptive phases--termed "disambiguation," "legitimation," and "routinization"--in their processing of information relevant to a maturing social cause.

Gleaned from general systems theory, the involved processes correspond metaphorically to sequential phases in the growth of a system (gestation, maturation, equilibration). Each deals with processes that seem to be characteristic of a certain temporal phase in the unfolding of a larger process--an ideology diffusion process. Thus these concepts should be seen both in terms of processes and of phases (1):

Disambiguation: A process whereby the basic doctrinal tenets of an emerging social cause themselves become defined, distinguished from each other, and are first manifest in the content of mass communication channels. Disambiguation should be predominant during the earliest phase of the diffusion progression, and continue until the approximate point of cresting in media attention to the philosophical themes of the social movement.

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Legitimation: A process by which those who regulate the content for a given channel or media organization (gatekeepers) recognize various concerns pertinent to a social cause as legitimate topics for coverage by their particular channels.

Routinization: A process whereby content relative to the movement is incorporated into the channel's regular operations on a fixed basis, such as through routine space, time, or personnel allocation. The approximate point of beginning is evidenced in changes in formats and/or from published statements indicating that such an administrative decision has been made.

The processes we proposed attendant to the development and spread of the environmental movement stem from several communication and social theories.

Diffusion

Few communication theories have been so mined as that subsumed under labels variously defined as innovation and information diffusion or technology transfer. Invariably, however, the studies have concerned themselves with the multi-stage flow of ideas and information among social systems respecting departures in quite specific agricultural, industrial, or public health measures (16, 24, 28). No one to our knowledge has applied the theory to the diffusion of something so diffuse as an ideology. In attempting to do so, we posited that some correlation might be found between messages carried by specialized channels and generated by persons classically defined as "issue entrepreneurs," "claims-makers," or "innovators" and messages found in the content of mass audience communication channels, respecting the diffusion of the philosophical tenets of environmentalism.

Agenda-Setting

The agenda-setting concept holds that the mass media establish what people think about if not what they in fact think (21). While this theory as applied to individuals has suffered some erosion in recent years (22, 38), inter-media agenda-setting remains comparatively untested. Although an earlier study had suggested that the daily press as a whole had played no agenda-setting function for individuals with respect to a specific environmental issue (the 1968-1969 debate over the National Environmental Policy Act) (30), we hypothesized that once environmental concerns had become legitimate topics for coverage, special interest environmental magazines might conceivably have set an agenda for general interest channels with respect to various specific environmental topics.

Social Change Theory

There is abundant literature on what is sometimes called "the natural history of social movements" (i.e., 37, 42), and some reports have described aspects of the interplay of mass communication processes with such an evolution. For example, the role of a house organ in publicizing an agrarian political group in Minnesota (23), media participation in moulding a new citizenry in France during the Terror (19), Martin Luther King's use of the media in the Voting Rights Act campaign of 1965 (9), the press and desegregation in Tennessee (11), the mass media in the making and unmaking of the New Left (10), and the contrasting roles of newspapers in conflict management in small and large cities (39). Only the latter, however, could be said to be quantitative in character. We posited that a systematic content analysis of appropriately selected mass

media would identify various stages in the maturation of the environmental movement from a relatively ambiguous set of precepts through a tentative acceptance of its primary concerns to routine reportage of both its tenets and its issues. Also from the realm of social change theory, the notion of change agents (18) was adopted for this study and redefined to include writers, advocates, claims-makers, academic leaders, social activists, zealots, organizers, supporters, and others who are acting either independently or through various organizations to promote an innovative social cause.

General Systems Theory

Drawing on various parent theories, the unifying operational theory for this study (schematized in Figure 1) was derived from a systems paradigm and very generally posits that as early "believer-advocates" (change agents) of a nucleating social cause seek out communication channels to stimulate discourse and broaden the base of supporters who can serve to reinforce confidence in their tenuous beliefs, they will find special interest channels that have editorial objectives inherently complemented by the cause to be reasonably receptive and tolerant of their sometimes ambiguous and normatively radical messages, while general audience channels will tend to be substantially inaccessible through direct means due to their need to focus on issues perceived to be both genuine and of general public concern. During the early crusading phase of the movement, special interest channels offer accessible public forums for the interchange, synthesis, clarification, and probable moderation of ideas, focusing ever-increasing amounts of media attention on the ideological themes and concerns of the social cause while also providing convenient mechanisms for the diffusion of social change messages to critical focal publics with potential socio-political efficacy, thereby conferring status, legitimacy and momentum to the movement and giving rise to influence flows that may impinge either directly (as through random cross-media content monitoring and other information seeking means) or indirectly (as through routine coverage of staged media events and political conflicts) upon the general audience media system.

The theory nevertheless posits that serious attention will not be given to the concerns of a gestating social cause by general audience channels until the basic tenets of the movement have been substantially disambiguated, the related issues are perceived as sufficiently salient, and a degree of legitimation has occurred in the perceptions of the gatekeepers for the general audience media organizations--a process facilitated in part by influence and information flows from special interest media that manage to cross boundaries and penetrate the input-filtering mechanisms of the general audience media systems. The theory further states that once the legitimation process has begun, the general audience media will be initially dependent upon various change agents (primarily through specialized media messages) for information and direction, but that the media organizations will then go through a series of adaptive responses that eventually stabilize as the staff members cultivate expertise in coping with concerns of the social cause (often to become change agents themselves) and as the allocation of resources and space (or time) for information pertinent to the social cause becomes routinized and integrated into the media system--systematizing the flow of relevant information to members of a general audience and eventually reducing the need for direction from special interest organizations.

From this piloting general theory, a series of specific hypotheses were derived for testing. These hypotheses are addressed individually in the findings report.

To analyze the interplay of the movement, selected communication media, and the messages of environmentalism, a variety of derived definitions were operationalized, and multiple hypothesis testing procedures were corroboratively employed.

The Movement

So contemporary is the environmental movement that it has as yet no definitive history (although one is being written at the moment by a recognized historian of the predecessor conservation movement) (13). There are, however, at least a half-dozen book-length, perceptive, and relatively objective "reports from the front" (3, 5, 25, 26, 29, 34). Clearly, of course, the environmental movement had its roots in the earlier conservation movement (25, 26, 27), illustrating the point that all movements occur in an historical context and rarely have a single starting point, however crucial a single precipitating event may appear to be.

No accounts agree on when the environmental movement began to emerge; however, an earlier related study had offered some evidence that there was very little if anything in the public prints of a clearly environmental cast prior to the appearance of a seminal text on Environmental Conservation in 1959 (33). To verify this evidence, a pre-coding test was conducted by analyzing publications from each media type, randomly sampled from 1949 to 1959. The results showed a base line of activity for both media types during this period, with no significant variations respecting their coverage of environmental concerns.

As an additional means of placing this study in a meaningful historical context, an independently developed and pre-established chronology of prominent environmental events (25) that occurred during the period under study was used to examine any possible relationships between "real world" historical events and significant variations in the levels of media activity. For purposes of analysis, each of the events of this listing were further categorized as representing either (a) a physical event or environmental crisis, (b) a media event, (c) an administrative decision, or (d) a major policy decision.

The Media

A comprehensive review of existing literature showed magazines, newsletters, and books to be the principal carriers of environmental information during the earlier periods of the movement (32). Of these three media types, magazines appeared to be the most widely used and presented the fewest sampling problems while offering reasonably good analogues in both special interest and general audience media categories; consequently, the study concerns itself only with the content of two representative members each of two types of magazines.

Special Interest Channel: A mass media organization with editorial objectives that center on a special parochial interest or interests read by a focal public. Audubon (originally Bird Lore), dating from 1899 as the organ of the National Audubon Society, is representative of the nature study/outdoor recreation/conservation genre, its traditional concerns centering around various threats to wildlife species. Environment (formerly Scientist and Citizen) is representative of the science/technology genre, dating from 1959 as the organ of the Scientists' Institute for Public Information, its original concern the threat of nuclear fallout to human health (32). It is now addressed to general environmental concerns and is published in the private sector by Heldref Publications, Washington, DC. Audubon and Environment were purposively selected to represent the special

interest channels as it was felt that of all publications in the sampling frame, they collectively dealt with the broadest possible range of environmental concerns.

General Audience Channel: A mass media organization that deals with a diversity of content that is not directed toward any particular interest group or enterprise but toward a heterogeneous, pluralistic mass audience. Time and Saturday Review (formerly Saturday Review of Literature) were deemed to be reasonably representative (although they probably tilt toward a "white collar" or even an "elitist" readership).

The Message

Environmental content variables were defined at three levels of abstraction--general, doctrinal, and substantive.

General, relevant, yet essentially unfocused environmental content: All material manifestly dealing with human concerns that are known or commonly believed to have a direct, discernible, or logically obvious effect (realized or potential) on the ecological-aesthetic integrity of various natural habitats, natural systems, natural/synthetic human ecosystems, and/or earth's total biosphere (36).

Doctrinal environmental ideology or "environmentalism," marked by four conceptual themes: Fragility--All natural systems have a limited tolerance for perturbation. This concept pertains to the rate and extent to which physical degradation is introduced into the environment as well as to the rate and extent to which energy is dissipated, and natural resources exploited or manipulated. Diversity--Long-term biological evolutionary processes tend toward increased complexity and higher levels of organization; it is by virtue of their diversity that mature ecosystems are adaptive enough to withstand a variety of traumas. But cultural intrusions have reduced both local and global ecological variety. (In recent years some ecologists (6) deny that ecosystem diversity is a precursor of stability, positing rather that the causal relationship is the reverse. Yet nobody questions a relationship between diversity and stability, and in the time-frame of this study the concept as stated was accepted with little debate). Quality--Seemingly efficient technologies and cultures have proven counter-productive in that they fail to function symbiotically with natural systems. If an environment capable of fulfilling humankind's higher-order aesthetic and humanistic needs is to be restored and maintained, certain value reorientations, some difficult tradeoffs, and some changes in life styles are in order. Policy--Resource conservation historically has involved ad hoc, stop-gap, one problem-one solution approaches. Environmental protection calls for a public decision-making process equipped for surveillance of the total environment and capable of imposing long-range economic, social, or legal sanctions against those elements presenting a threat to the public interest (15).

Comprehensiveness: Originally conceived as a fifth ideological theme--the John Muir dictum that "when we try to pick out anything by itself we find it hitched to everything else in the universe"--comprehensiveness was actually operationalized as a measure of the comprehensiveness of the article itself rather than as evidence of a particular theme. Comprehensiveness was further defined to include "scope"--the extent to which the concerns of the article spanned beyond the traditional concerns of early conservationism; and "approach"--the extent to which the writer employed a holistic, ecological strategy in reporting and interpreting an environmental topic or topics.

Substantive Issues: At the most specific level, each article was coded for the presence or absence of the following issues: resource management, wilderness preservation, land use, appropriate technology, pollution, toxic substances, radiation, nuclear proliferation, energy conversion, poverty, population control (2).

(While these concepts, themes, and topics may appear self-explanatory, they have been substantially abbreviated here and their detailed operational definitions should be consulted in case they are to be used in any follow-on study.) (35)

We do not mean to imply that all of these parameters, concepts, and issues were accepted, shared, or attended to by all of the individuals, groups, and agencies flying an environmental flag. Environmentalism itself is marked by diversity (which may account in part for its durability as a movement). But, all in all, these definitions are submitted as a reasonably apt representation of environmental precepts and concerns.

Reliability

As one test of the reliability of the instrument, seven students in a graduate seminar on environmental communications rated each of six articles on general environmental content and six conceptual themes from the ideological level of analysis. Inter-coder agreement was 100 percent for general environmental content and averaged 87 percent (range 74 percent to 98 percent) for the themes. As a final test of reliability, the first author (who coded all articles for the study) recoded 161 articles that had been coded at least one year earlier. His agreement for general content was also 100 percent, for ideological themes 93.7 percent, and for specific substantive topics 96.6 percent.

Testing Procedure

For the special interest magazines, Aubudon and Environment (each of which was bi-monthly), a single issue was randomly sampled for each of the 21 years in the study period, 1959-1979. For the general audience magazines, Time and Saturday Review, one weekly issue was then randomly sampled from the eight-week period corresponding to the already sampled issue of the special interest magazines. Each article was then coded and individual articles served as the unit of analysis. A total of 1,182 articles from special interest and 1,802 articles from general audience magazines were coded.

What we will report as results will be percentages of articles for a channel type in a given year. For general environmental content, we will report the percentage of all articles containing such content. For the more focused variables, environmental ideology and specific substantive topics, a fairer percentage seems to be the percentage of articles meeting the criterion for general environmental content that also had content meeting the definitions at the more specific levels (in other words, a conditional percentage).

Conclusions about long-term message trends occurring over a period of six years or more are based on Spearman rank-order correlations and t-tests of proportions applied in conjunction with the sign test for matched pairs. That is, rank-order correlations were used to indicate direction and consistency of the trends while the t-test provided a means for testing the magnitude of trend changes and the sign test was used primarily for making within- and between-group

comparisons by testing the extent of covariation over time for juxtaposed message variable trend lines. Tests for possible short-term agenda-setting influences are based both on the t-test of proportions and on sign tests for all possible lags within three years (plus or minus). In all cases, an alpha level of .05 has been the criterion for any results reported to be significant. We also weighted each of the codings by an attention score to reflect a measure of space and prominence, but could discern no differences in results given the added complication, and will thus report only the simpler coding.

Test results on message variations revealed significant and consistent trends marked by recurring cyclical patterns, suggesting an ideology diffusion process that unfolds quite independently from random "real world" events.

The principal findings of this study were a direct result of a priori hypothesis testing; however, since it was basically a pioneering study with certain exploratory objectives, some additional findings were arrived at fortuitously as a result of explorative efforts. In these instances, ex post facto hypotheses were then formulated and tested according to the same procedures as used for the a priori hypotheses. Results presented here will be limited to the most notable findings, reduced to summary form. (For a more detailed disclosure, the parent study should be consulted.)

As a way of presenting an overall summary of the data, Figure 2 shows the percentages of articles in the two special interest magazines having content meeting the definitions of each of our three levels--general environmental content, doctrinal environmental content, and specific substantive issues. Figure 3 presents the same results across the study period for the two general audience magazines, and Figure 4 places the smoothed trend lines for all three of the message variables and both channel types into their proper relationship for visual comparison.

Based on our statistical tests of these data, we offer the following findings and observations about trends and the relationships between trends:

1. Early attention by special interest magazines progressed from a heightened general awareness, manifested in an increase in attention to general environmental information, to an increase in attention to conceptual themes as those themes became disambiguated.

2. The earliest discernible increase (1965-1966) in attention given environmental information by general audience magazines was preceded by a sustained period of regular attention (1959-1966) given such environmental information by special interest magazines.

3. Likewise, the period of greatest increase in attention given by general audience magazines to environmentalism's conceptual themes was preceded in time by a comparable increase in attention given to those themes by special interest channels.

4. We had predicted that changes in coverage of specific substantive topics by general channels would be preceded by such coverage in the special interest magazines. The evidence here, however, is quite mixed. The special interest magazines did lead on three topics (pollution, toxic substances, and

nuclear proliferation), but the general magazines led on three others (energy conversion, appropriate technology, and resource management), and no order of precedence could be determined for the five other topics. There is some indication of an historical difference that may be important, in that the lead by special interest channels occurred during the early 1960s, while instances where the general magazines led occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s. However, given the mixture of results here, we feel we can draw no strong conclusions.

5. Contrary to our expectations, special interest magazines did not differ significantly from general audience magazines in the relative attention paid to conceptual themes compared to substantive issues. For both media, the findings point to an early emphasis on conceptual themes prior to routinization, with a concurrent shift to substantive issues during the routinization phase.

6. When special interest magazines expanded the comprehensiveness of the scope of their environmental coverage to include broader concerns (1964-1971), there was a reduction in attention given their traditional parochial interests as the media organization adapted to a changing "environment." Conversely, after 1975 the special interest magazines seemed to sense they might have over-extended themselves, and there was a perceptible shift back to an emphasis on traditional concerns--demonstrating, inadvertently, perhaps, that the ecological tenet, "limits to growth," applies alike to mice, men, and media processes.

7. The most prominent clustering of federal environmental policy decisions (i.e., NEPA, 1969--EPA, 1970), signifying institutional change, was preceded in time by the period of greatest increase in both relevant content and doctrinal information in special interest magazines, and followed by comparable increases in relevant and doctrinal content in general audience magazines. (A number of theoretical models have been constructed to describe the movement of information from one social system to another. Kaufman (17) and Kotler (18) seem to support the view that information about "change goals" is disseminated by "claims-makers" to the communications subsystems and thence to the public and the government. Tichenor et al (40), on the other hand, posit that the flow is "from professional and interest group concern through independent publication and attention in government to mass media attention and public concern." The data presented here tend to support the latter information diffusion model.)

8. Distinct, consistent, and sequentially logical content trends marked by significant message variations identifying the three basic diffusion phases of disambiguation, legitimation, and routinization emerged over time for both special interest and general audience channels. It was also found that each magazine, at some point, introduced a regular feature wherein general environmental information and news were compartmentalized. For Audubon, it was "The Audubon View" and "The Audubon Cause"; for Environment, an insert called "Spectrum." Saturday Review introduced an "Environmental Newsletter," and Time created a new department termed "Environment." These regular features were obviously not introduced simultaneously; in fact, their introduction was far from a tidy process, involving a number of adaptations, such as changes in titles, changes in format, and in the case of Time a temporary elimination and reintroduction. (Gans (8) has independently observed that "new complexes are added as new activities and actors come to the fore"; for example, "a wide array of once unrelated stories are now connected to a symbolic complex called 'the Environment.'" Tuchman (41) has also documented a general "routinization" process.)

9. It was expected that the trend line for all three types of message variables would assume essentially linear or moderately curvilinear progressions. In actuality, a series of recurring patterns involving the message variables of environmental content and environmentalism suggest a progression for both general audience and special interest channels characterized by a sequence of periodic "waves" that do not appear to be tied to any "real world" events. Major cycles for special interest magazines tended to be more prolonged than for general audience magazines.

The periodic cycles were characterized by periods of rapidly accelerating activity, which tapered off more gradually in a way that would be represented graphically by a positively skewed curve. The three dependent message variables appeared to interact differently and with a high degree of periodicity both within and between channel types during the various phases of the diffusion process. Very generally, this interactive process appeared to be characterized by an early increase in relevant content in the special interest channels, followed by a heightened level of conceptual discussion in the same magazines, trailed by a similar sequence in the general audience magazines. (This cyclical, synergistic phenomenon may well be a manifestation of homeostatic feedback mechanisms operating within the different media systems, regulating content according to the unique inertial makeup of each particular system.)

10. There appeared to be no clearly identifiable or consistent pattern relating short-term message variation to relevant historical events. This was true for both media types at all levels of abstraction. Had such a pattern been identified, it could have indicated a degree of spontaneity between such events and the issue formation process. (One notable exception to this finding might be a significant increase shown in the level of attention to the topic of energy conversion by both channel types during the energy crises of the middle and late seventies.)

11. After 20 years of rising and declining trends for the three message variables, the amount of general environmental content appeared by 1979 to be equilibrating at a level significantly higher than it had been in 1959--true alike for both special interest and general audience magazines. The level of specific substantive coverage was also significantly higher than in 1959 in special interest magazines, but not in general audience channels, although earlier increases (1965-1975) in the latter had been statistically significant. The amount of attention to conceptual themes (environmentalism) had dropped off in both channel types by 1979.

In summary, this study very generally showed a diffusion progression for environmental information, concepts, and concerns featuring a sustained period of increasing media attention by special interest channels that clearly preceded the earliest significant increases in attention by general audience media, and a content emphasis for both media types that gradually shifted over time from relevant but unfocused information to doctrinal content to coverage of specific substantive issues. In addition, there were incrementally escalating levels of media attention marked by significant and consistent patterns that recur with a high degree of periodicity and appear to be substantially independent of random real world events. Sequence analysis of short-term variations in attention given to eleven substantive topics showed evidence of possible early agenda-setting influence from special interest to general audience media for three topics, and from general audience to special interest media for three others, while tests on the remaining topics remained ambiguous. In the case of both special interest and general audience channels, distinct, consistent, and sequentially

logical content trends could be identified and characterized for the three basic diffusion phases of disambiguation, legitimation, and routinization.

How useful are these findings? Are they peculiar to a particular time in the evolution of environmentalism, or might they have generalability to communication media roles in other social movements?

It is obvious, first, that even though special interest channels clearly preceded general audience channels in their legitimation of an environmental ideology, it cannot be proven that any influence flows were therefore at work. Such a determination of causality would require a far more focused study with a design that allowed for a comprehensive analysis of variance, perhaps also incorporating survey techniques and/or detailed case analyses. What the findings of this pilot study do, however, is provide grounds for rejecting a number of null and alternative hypotheses, while pointing out others that might warrant further testing.

Second, all that this study looked at was one form of mass media, ignoring a whole range of communication modes and exogenous factors. Hence the process phenomenon seemingly made evident has uncertain generalizability to other media; however, a preliminary review showed specialized magazines to be principal carriers of environmental information and every effort was made to keep the sampling procedure representative. As for the general audience side of the equation, all of the publications from this sampling frame shared the common editorial objective of appealing to a heterogeneous, pluralistic mass audience through a diverse content balance. It is primarily the extent to which any selected channel might have failed to achieve this objective over time that would severely curtail generalizability. In this light, it seems reasonable to assume greater inherent universality among general audience media than for those more specialized. Supporting data from replicatory studies involving other media and communication modes would nevetheless be required before any general statements could be made relative to the findings of this study.

Third, the environmental movement itself may not be truly representative of most social movements, although students of social problems increasingly treat it as such (7) and a review of its history tends to suggest that it has evolved, according to the classical mold, from what could be identified as an early "crusading" stage to a "popular movement" stage and on to its current "managerial/ bureaucratic" status (18).

Finally, the study says nothing at all about the diffusion of information among general audience magazines and their publics. It may well be that a number of additional steps are involved before even relevant information, irrespective of ideological content, significantly reaches a truly "mass" rank-and-file audience. Clearly the diffusion of a social change ideology must be recognized as a multi-step-flow process involving a series of complex attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral adaptations and social interactions occurring at a variety of levels through a range of different modes from formal educational efforts to organized action group activities and from mass to inter-personal communications. Pragmatic considerations, however, necessarily limit any single effort at systematically examining this multi-stage process to dealing with perhaps two or three links in the progression. The scope of this study has been limited to examining the respective roles played over time in the diffusion of a particular social change ideology by nationally distributed general and special print media of an essentially

highbrow leaning. Any further inquiry into the diffusion process as it impinges on a truly rank-and-file mass audience might call for a more focused look at the respective roles of highbrow vs. lowbrow media, print vs. electronic media, national vs. local media, or more specifically, magazines or newspapers vs. TV network news.

So in a number of ways the study raised more questions than it suggested answers. But assuming that what seems to be evident has some utility as a possible model of ideology diffusion, how can it best be depicted?

Figure 5 places the principal phases of the ideology diffusion progression into their proper temporal context. Although they were based on the findings of the study, the trend lines in the drawing are idealized. However, the relative time-frames for the different phases of the progression were abstracted directly from data and are drawn to scale. The respective designations for the three phases were in turn determined by the operational definitions for disambiguation, legitimation, and routinization.

Based on our findings, we would re-draw our original model of Figure 1 as we have done in Figure 6. In this model, the relationships of the a priori model are now laid on the same time-line as Figures 2-5, and thus represent in schematic form our overall interpretation of the data (although our inclusion of focal and general publics is of course still conjecture).

In accordance with the findings, the model in Figure 6 portrays the diffusion of a social change concept as a dynamic process whereby an early "predisposing thrust" of media attention is first evidenced in the content of special interest channels as an effect of change-agent influence brought on by early claims makers seeking to disambiguate and diffuse their seminal and tenuous "social reality." This initial thrust in media attention is shown by the model to be occurring during a "disambiguation/prolegitimation" period, suggesting that at least certain tenets of the social cause are perceived to be legitimate concerns at this stage by a nucleus of "early adopters" within the media organization. The initial period is followed by a comparatively brief "gestation" period (probably a manifestation of inertial lag resulting from a limited propensity for adaptation inherent in the media system), which is succeeded by a second more substantial and prolonged period of increased media attention, as the ideological precepts underlying the social cause become fully legitimized in the mind's eye of the gatekeepers for the special interest channels and as the media organizations become change agencies in themselves, with coverage of concerns relevant to the social cause becoming routinized into their regular operations.

A similar progression is shown in Figure 6 for the general audience channels, only in their case the early "predisposing thrust" occurs subsequent to a sustained period of significant media attention by special interest channels, and the entire period of heightened media attention for general audience channels is considerably more abbreviated in time. Influence flows shown in the model suggest that the increases in media attention for general audience channels may be augmented if not precipitated by influence and information flows from special interest channels and elements of their focal publics that have galvanized into change agencies as these flows infiltrate the general audience system.

In overview, the ideology diffusion process appears here to be an incremental phenomenon that is characterized by a high degree of periodicity with synergistically escalating levels of overall substantive media attention being directed to the social cause as a result of an increasingly interactive relationship between

special interest and general audience channels over time. We propose that the relatively stable levels of general and ideological content late in the study period indicate an equilibration, with each channel having established its niche as a functioning component of the larger "communication ecosystem" that has crystallized around the social cause. We nevertheless recognize our conclusions as tentative and acknowledge that more research is clearly needed to firm up the empirical foundation before a truly cosmic view of the ideology diffusion process can be assumed.

It is our view that continued research and theory construction aimed at clarifying the ideology diffusion process would have considerable heuristic value in that such an enterprise could serve to sharpen predictive capabilities relative to cultural diffusion and social change. And from the standpoint of the practitioner or social activist, it might well give rise to effective rationales for making appropriate communication channel selections and prudent strategy decisions.

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FIGURE 1

PROPOSED IDEOLOGY DIFFUSION MODEL

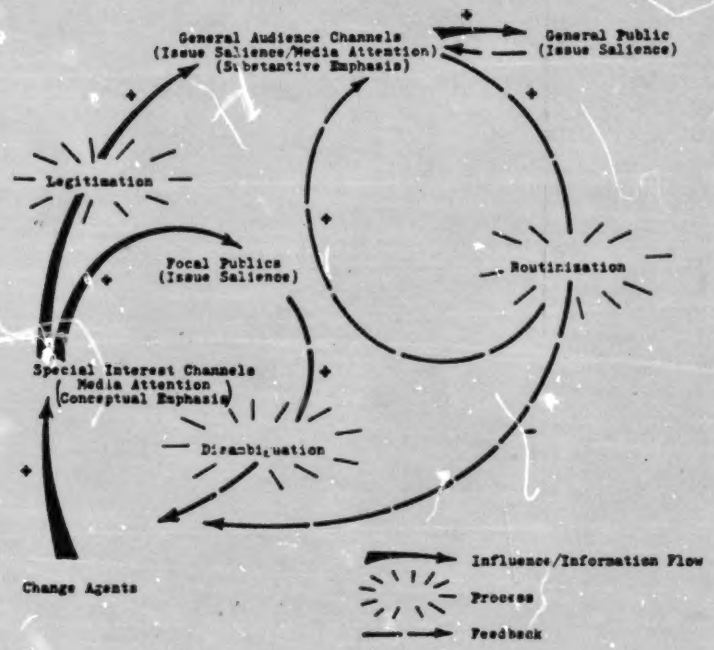
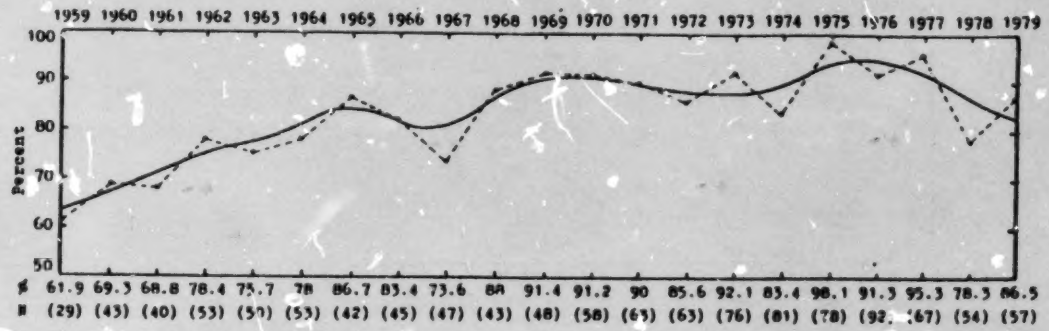


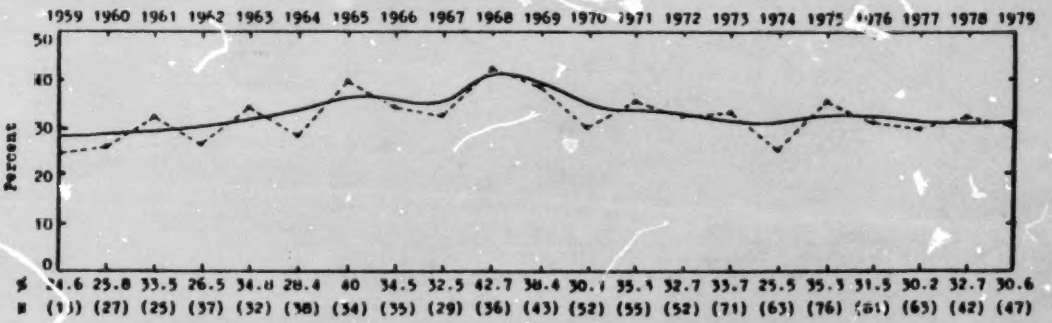
FIGURE 2

ACTUAL AND SMOOTHED TREND LINES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONTENT, ENVIRONMENTALISM AND SUBSTANTIVE CONTENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST CHANNELS

Environmental Content (General):



Environmentalism:



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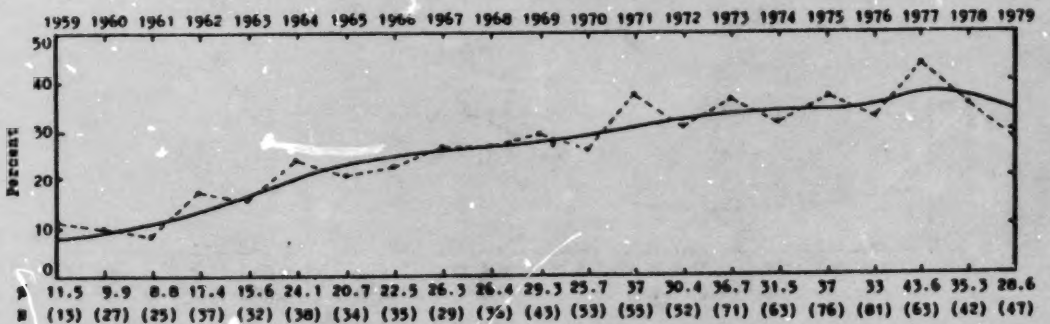
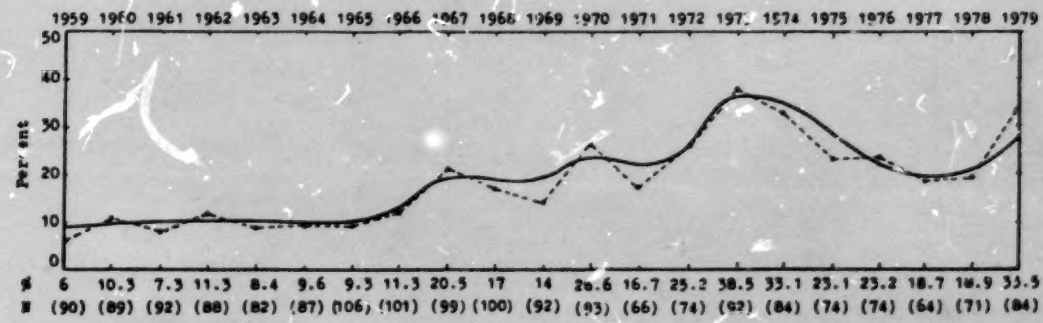


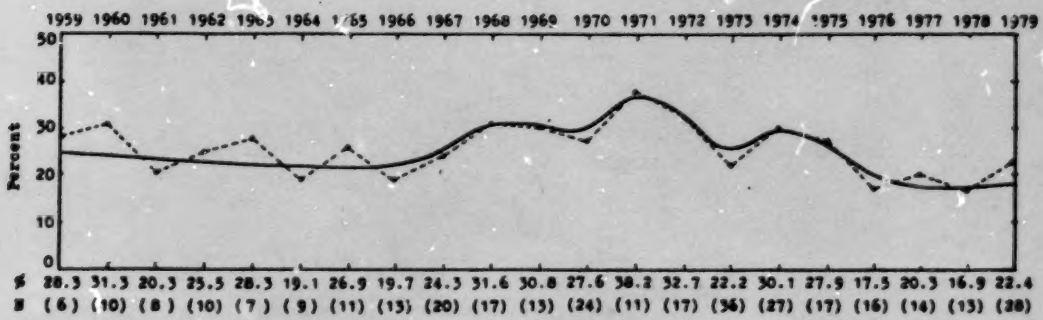
FIGURE 3

ACTUAL AND SMOOTHED TREND LINES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONTENT, ENVIRONMENTALISM AND SUBSTANTIVE CONTENT OF GENERAL AUDIENCE CHANNELS

Environmental Content (General):



Environmentalism:



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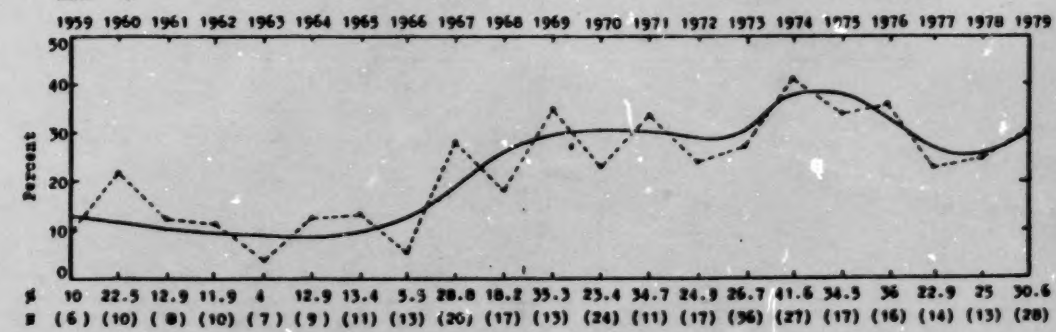


FIGURE 4

JUXTAPOSED TREND LINES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONTENT, ENVIRONMENTALISM AND SUBSTANTIVE CONTENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST AND GENERAL AUDIENCE CHANNELS

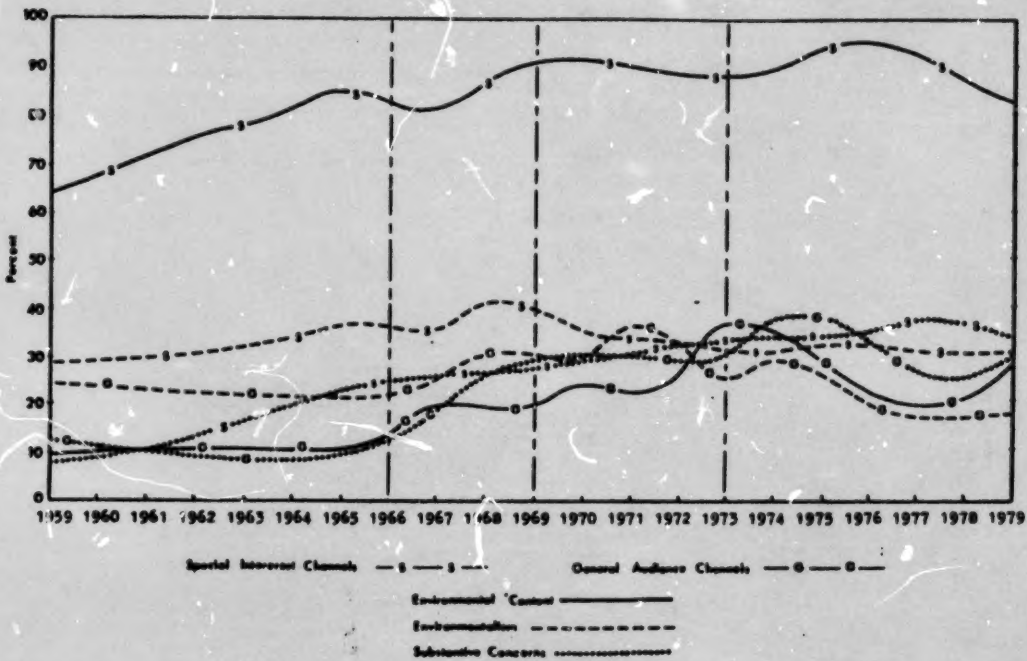


FIGURE 5

PHASES OF THE IDEOLOGY DIFFUSION PROGRESSION

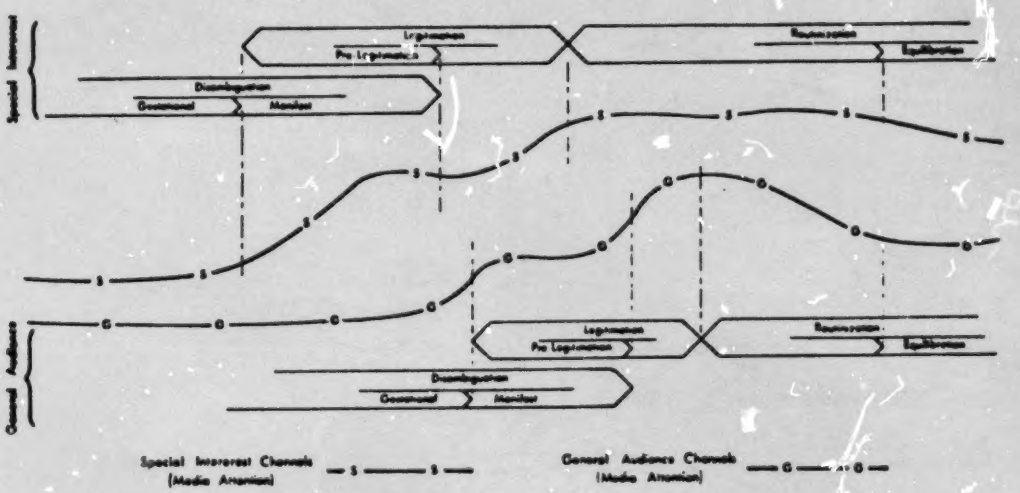
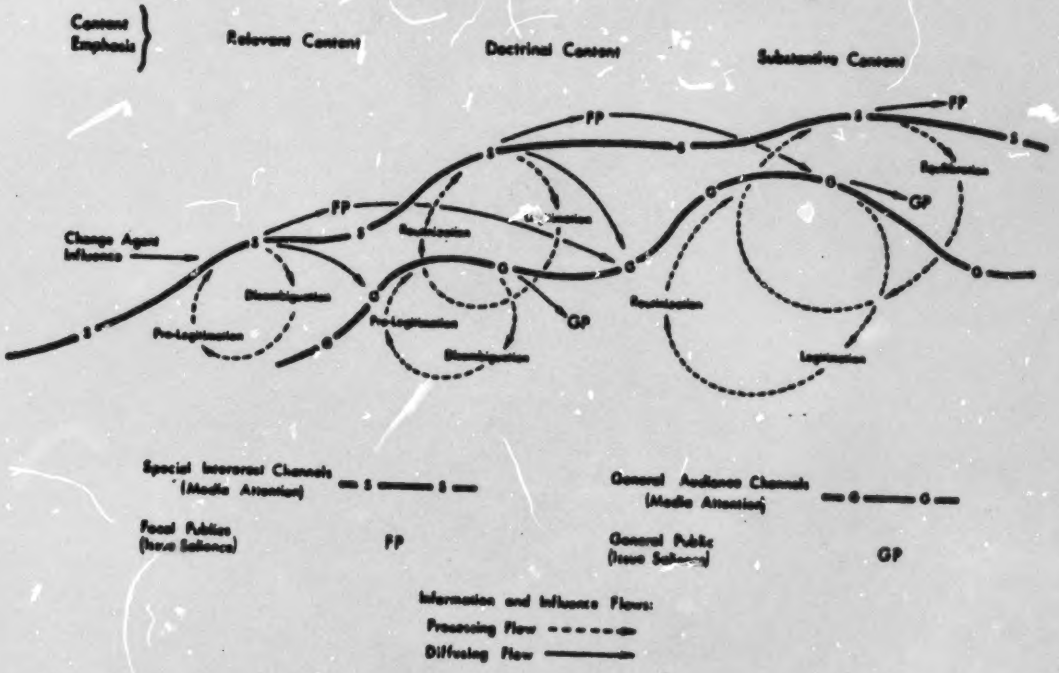

Special Interest
Legitimation
Pre Legitimation
Routinization
Equilibration
Disambiguation
Government
Monitor
S
S
S

FIGURE 6

DYNAMIC MODEL OF THE IDEOLOGY DIFFUSION PROCESS



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